

Exploring connections of children and counselling within education contexts

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Ngāi Tahu - the iwi

Background

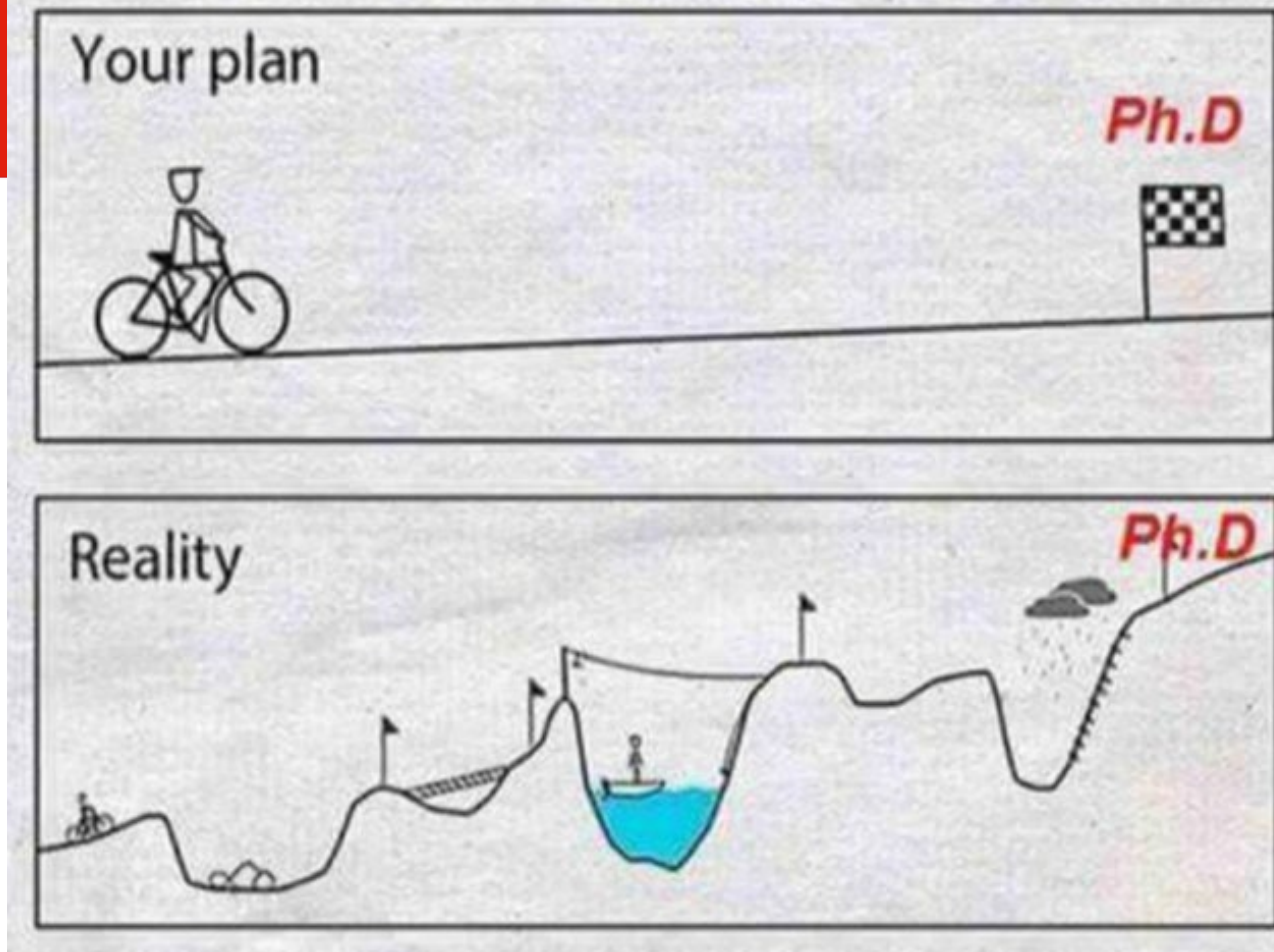


- Counselling
- Child and family therapy
- Clinical supervision
- Counsellor Educator
- Researcher

Outline for today

- Two studies related to children in Aotearoa NZ
1. My PhD study, examined language about sexuality & childhood
 2. My study leave project, scoping counselling in primary schools
- Exploring intersections of children and counselling in education

1. PhD



Flanagan, P. G. (2019). *Unpacking the effects of power relations in childhood sexuality: A discursive analysis based on conversations with parents, teachers and counsellors* (Thesis, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)). The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/12805>

Doctoral research

- *Focus on analysing ‘talk’, language used by adults*
- *Participants were from 2 schools and 1 community agency and invited to respond to a series of 6 vignettes*
- *28 participants 25F 3M (13 parents, 9 teachers, 6 therapists)*
- *Interviews: 17 individual (5 teachers, 6 parents, 6 therapists),
3 groups (7 parents, 4 teachers, 4 therapists)*

Methodology

- Conceptual framework

- Discourse (Foucault) and Deconstruction (Derrida)
- Feminist poststructuralist analysis (B. Davies, Lather),
deconstructing gendered power relations (Butler)



- Inquiry

- Absence of children, giving voice to children
- Vignettes – sensitive and ethical practice of inquiry
- Interviews – Individual and Group (transcripts/checking)

- Ethics
 - reflexive practice (positioning)
 - relational
 - consultative
- Analysis
 - Analysis of discourse
 - deconstructing force relations of power

Mapping relations of power

What are the effects of power generated by what was said?

What are the links between these discourses, the effects of power, and the pleasures that were invested in them?

What knowledge (savoir) was formed as a result of this linkage?

The object, in short, is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world. (Foucault, 1978, p. 11)

What are the effects of power generated by what was said?

- Think about the question, “where did I come from?”
- How might your parents have answered this? How might you answer this with your children? What’s the difference?
- What place do half-truths and euphemisms have in our families and friends’ descriptions to children?
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGxJ67DI1oM>

Research Questions

- What language is used to describe child sexuality by adults (parents, teachers and counsellors) in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- What discourses about childhood and sexuality are visible within this language?
- How does this language construct specific notions of ‘the child’ and sexuality?
- How is ‘the child’ constructed as a sexual being within these discourses?
- In what ways, through language, might children be understood as sexual subjects within families and society?
- “What were the effects of power generated by what was said?”
(Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 11)

Vignettes – brief summaries

1. 5 year old boy urinates on school playground
2. Two 8 year old children, boy and girl, play together – girl kisses boy on the lips
3. 5 year old boy pulls his pants down in class
4. 5 year old girl rubs herself each day between her legs
5. 9 year old boy in the toilets touches another boy's penis
6. 7 year old boy overheard by teacher telling a 6 year old girl, “and that is when I put my penis in your vagina”

Findings

- Describe and scrutinise discourses that are constituted and reconstituted in language – innocence; risk/moral panic; parental responsibility; education; children's rights
1. That children should know about sex only as heteronormatively gendered
 2. That children should not know about sex as reproduction
 3. That there is little place for sexual pleasure as a child

Teacher responses

- Today, focus on teacher responses – what teachers experience and face within the primary school context
- Previous writing about child sexuality in school contexts
 - Flanagan, P. (2014). Unpacking ideas of sexuality in childhood: What do primary teachers and parents say? *Open Review of Educational Research*, 1(1), 160-170. doi:10.1080/23265507.2014.972436
 - Flanagan, P. (2011). Making sense of children's sexuality: Understanding sexual development and activity in education contexts. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 16(3), 69-79. doi: 10.15663/wje.v16i3.36
 - Flanagan, P. (2009). Play, prey or "sexploration"? Understanding and responding to sexual actions by children at primary school. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 3, 19-26.

Teacher view: The child and their body

- Jayne, 20 years teaching experience, teaching Years 1-2
- School 700+ students, Years 1-6, Māori 50+%, Pākehā 25%
- “Children are becoming more aware of their bodies a lot earlier”
- Sexual curiosity – Looking at bodies
- “She’s a girl, she just wants to be a boy”
- “What we did in our family”
- Silence - Old school discomforts with reproduction
- Children’s experience of (sexual) pleasure

“Children are becoming more aware of their bodies a lot earlier”



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...the girls get changed in my office or in the class room next door and the boys get changed here and the children make a lot more fuss over ‘Ohhh, I saw his bum!’ or ‘Oh, he’s looking at me through the window!’ those sorts of things.

Whereas even a few years ago that wouldn’t have been an issue. So maybe children are becoming more aware of their bodies a lot earlier.



Sexual curiosity: Looking at bodies

my three boys ... every time I'd go and get into the bath myself, my oldest son 'oh yay you're getting into the bath' and all the boys would hop in with me and that happened until Bob was about 9 and then no more.

So his brothers were 4 and 5 at the time and once Bob said 'no, we don't get into the bath with Mum anymore'. Then his younger brothers, absolutely not, no way.

And it was very much my middle boy, if I went in and he was getting changed, it would be like 'MUUUM' sort of thing, even though he was about 5 or 6 by that stage.

Whereas I sort of assumed that the younger boys would carry on thinking it was alright to have a shower with Mum or a bath with Mum until they were about 8 or 9.

“She’s a girl, she wants to be a boy”



[this interview has] been a very interesting process because it's made me think about my own reactions to things and normally [pause]

I think even the same-sex kissing, I had a little bit of an 'ooo, what if I saw two boys kissing?' and while I can speak the jargon ... I guess on a more personal level it did make me think 'oh, how comfortable am I with this?'

...and there's a little girl who I've...had lots of dealings with but I thought she was a boy because she said she was a boy and she certainly looks very, very boyish and when she told me her name, it's a very girly name but she said 'I don't care that I've got that name even though I'm a boy, it doesn't worry me that I'm called that. That's what my mother wanted to call me and so she did.'

And I accepted that on totally face value ‘oh well, you’ve got a good attitude, good boy’ sort of thing. I probably said good boy to her and it wasn’t until quite recently and I said to another teacher ‘that’s terrible that the mother called her son that name’ and the other teacher’s like ‘she’s a girl. She just wants to be a boy.’

And I said ‘are we talking about the same kid?’ ‘Yeah, yeah. She’s a girl’

and I said 'I asked her if she was a girl and she told me she was a boy' and then the next time I saw her I almost felt like saying something like 'why did you tell me you were a boy when you're a girl?' or 'you should be proud to be a girl' or 'happy that you're a girl' or something like that. I didn't of course because I thought if that's a stage she's going through, why should a teacher make her feel unhappy or self-conscious.

But my reaction was ‘oh, of course she’s a girl.’

She should be honest and say yes I’m a girl rather than...you know.



“What we did in our family”

Children do kiss each other. My youngest son is 13, he still kisses me, [and] long may it last. I would be horrified if someone said ‘oh your son still kisses you, that’s inappropriate now at his age’ sort of thing.

And children do experiment with what they see, particularly if their parents are loving together - and it just depends on your own family practices. We kiss a lot in our family, bedtime, everyone gets kissed ‘goodnight’, those sorts of things.

And if those two children have a close relationship, which they obviously do because they're playing both in and out of the classroom, I would also think would there be such a big deal if it was her kissing another girl? Or if it was two boys kissing? Does that make it better or worse?

I think that's the NZ kiwi male culture too. You encourage the boys to be tough and strong and boys don't cry, my brother was never allowed to cry, those sorts of things 'boys don't cry'. I think whoever was getting upset about it or concerned about it would need to think 'now why is this making me unhappy? Why is this making me feel uncomfortable?' Because again, they're eight years old, they're just children.

Resisting the silence and invisibility of sex talk

- Responsible women and absent men (mothers, teachers, academics)
- Adult responsibility for childhood and sexuality is gendered
- Struggles and silences: Where and how to speak sexuality
 - silence is used as a strategy with children
 - silence is used as a strategy with adults
- Where do teachers find spaces to engage in conversations where they feel safe?

Questions / Implications

- With the person next to you -
- What questions come forward for you at this stage of this presentation?
- Are there any particular areas you are unclear about that you would like clarified?

2. Counselling in Primary Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand - A scoping study



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Study leave – to scope the practice of counselling in primary schools.

- **a review of counselling literature** with school children ages 5-12;
- **analysis of government policy documents** for counselling in primary schools; and
- **interviews with counsellors and principals in primary schools**, to explore their experience of counselling in context (questions about each school's processes, policies, procedures with regard to the employment or contracting of counsellors)

Discourses that shape practices

- Counselling – what comes to mind for you? What are the stories about counselling that shape your ideas? How do you speak about counselling?
- Childhood – what are your understandings of childhood? What ways do you shape childhood (adulthood) by your talk?
[Innocence / Moral panic / parental responsibility / rights]
- Education – what ideas do you have about schooling for children aged 5-12 years? What does education discourse do to children? To teachers? To parents?

Current climate

- Counselling in primary schools is not a common service in Aotearoa New Zealand
- July 2020, Associate Minister of Education, Tracey Martin announced that NZ Government was making post-Covid funding available for counselling in schools



Current climate

- Early in 2021, Ministry of Education (MoE) offered Expression of Interest to contract for counselling services in schools by community organisations
- I am asking schools and agencies to participate in interviews about the current provision of counselling services in primary schools

What relationship might a counsellor have with a school?

There is a concern that externally contracted counsellors risk being detached from the day-to-day life of the school...

(Manthei, Tuck, Agee et al., 2020, p. 15)

- How are counsellors selected/'inducted' into school community and culture?
- How might counsellors shape their practice in primary schools to be aware of their acceptance and overall effectiveness due to being 'detached' from the day-to-day life of the school?

What will be the counsellor/student ratio?

Manthei, Tuck, Crocket et al. (2020) found that ratios of counsellors to students in NZ secondary schools (1:668) far exceeded ratios recommended by the American School Counselor Association (1:250) and NZAC (1:400).

Potential questions for primary school counselling:

- has a counsellor-student ratio been explored for primary schools?

How will counselling outcomes be measured in primary schools?

- 69% of students attending counselling had fewer than 5 sessions.
Avg ORS score changed positively and significantly over time.
(Manthei, Tuck, Crocket et al., 2020)
- Potential questions for primary school counselling:
 - has evaluation or outcome research been planned in primary schools?
 - what level of qualification is required and will any particular counselling approaches be preferred?

Who comes to the school counsellor and what do they talk about?



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Hughes, Barr & Graham (2019) provide evidence that students from all levels of NZ secondary schooling use school counsellors to address significant and serious mental health issues.

Five issues most frequently reported – family, anxiety, school, peer friendships, and depression

- Key issues for primary school counselling:
 - who is accessing primary school counselling services?
 - what issues do they talk about?
 - how will students access counsellors?

Professional development and supervision



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[Counsellors] found that their workload had expanded, resources they could call on for support and expertise had deteriorated, the time they have to do their work was inadequate, the atmosphere in the school itself was often critical and unhelpful, and the job had become considerably more difficult. (Manthei, 1999, p. 45).

- Key questions for primary schools/agencies and counsellors:
 - what opportunities/funds are there for counsellors' ongoing professional development and clinical supervision?

What is expected of counsellors within the education context?

- Besley (2002) noted that *“school counselling can clearly demonstrate that it has an important part to play in meeting the emotional and social needs of adolescents, a part that requires specialist training, skills, understanding and expertise”* (p. 295)
- Key issues for primary school counselling:
 - how might counsellors support children where there are barriers to learning?
 - how might counsellors support children where there are high rates of suspension and suicide?

Some questions:

- *Where counselling in primary schools is offered/provided, what were the contexts in which this began? E.g., Is it a short term contract/fixed term employment? Is it internally/externally funded?*
- *What policies, contracts have been developed related to counselling in Primary Schools in NZ?*
- *Where counselling is offered/provided in Primary Schools, what are the experiences of principals and counsellors about this service?*

- *Were there difficulties in setting up the service? From the perspectives of Principals and Counsellors?*
- *What funding sources have been available for counselling in primary schools?*
- *Is counselling considered a short/medium/long term service within the school?*
- *What measures (if any) are being considered if/when counselling services end?*